

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /062 W
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R 101251Z JUN 77

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4011
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBUUY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: STATE ASSEMPLY ELECTIONS: OUTLOOK AS BALLOTTING
BEGINS

REF: NEW DELHI 7963

SUMMARY. POLLING IN THE STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS BEGINS TODAY.
THE CAMPAIGN SEEMS TO BE AN ANTI-CLIMAX AFTER THE EXCITEMENT
OF THE LOK SABHA POLL, WITH VOTER APATHY HIGH, POLITICAL
ACTIVITY IN A LOW KEY AND VOTER TURNOUT LIKELY TO BE RATHER
LIGHT. NO NEW GROUND HAS BEEN BROKEN IN TERMS OF ISSUES OR
RHETORIC, AND LOCAL ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES WILL PROBABLY
BE MORE SIGNIFICANT FACTORS THAN IN MARCH. THE TICKET SCRAMBLE
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STILL TARNISHES JANATA'S IMAGE, BUT CONGRESS CONTINUES TO
BE PLAGUED BY DISSENSION AND DEMORALIZATION. THE ELECTORAL
APPEAL OF THOSE JANATA "REBELS" STILL IN THE RACE REMAINS THE
MAJOR IMPOUNDERABLE FACTOR. EXCEPT FOR TAMIL NADU AND WEST
BENGAL, MOST OBSERVERS PREDICT THAT JANATA WILL WIN "COMFOR-
TABLE" MAJORITIES IN THE ASSEMBLIES. THESE GENERAL EXPECTA-O
TIONS OF JANATA MAJORITIES IN EIGHT OF THE TEN STATES WHERE

POLLING IS TO TAKE PLACE HAVE BECOME A BENCHMARK AGAINST WHICH THE ACTUAL OUTCOME, WHICH WE BELIEVE IS NOT PREDICTABLE IS LIKELY TO BE MEASURED. THE ELECTIONS WILL BE FOLLOWED BY POSSIBLY PROLONGED STRUGGLES OVER THE FORMATION OF STATE GOVERNMENTS. FROM THE NATIONAL VIEWPOINT, THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THIS NEXT STEP IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS WILL BE WHAT IT SIGNIFIES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER AND INFLUENCE AMONG KEY NATIONAL FIGURES AND WHAT IT COULD MEAN FOR THE COHESION OF THE JANATA PARTY. A POOR CONGRESS SHOWING WOULD PRESUMABLY STRENGTHEN THE HANDS OF THOSE ANXIOUS TO OUST MRS. GANDHI AND HER ASSOCIATES AND COULD ALSO SET THE STAGE FOR FURTHER DEFECTS FROM THE PARTY. END SUMMARY.

1. WITH POLLING BEGINNING IN SOME AREAS TODAY, CAMPAIGNING IN THE STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS HAS BEGUN TO WIND DOWN, IN MANY PLACES BEFORE IT EVER REALLY MOVED INTO HIGH GEAR. PROMINENT JANATA AND CONGRESS LEADERS HAVE BEEN OUT ON THE HUSTINGS IN GREATER NUMBERS DURING THE PAST WEEK, BUT THEIR APPEARANCES HAVE BEEN FEWER AND AUDIENCES SMALLER THAN IN THE LOK SABHA RACE, AND BOTH THE HAT AND SHORTAGE OF FUNDS HAVE RESTRICTED CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY. VIRTUALLY ALL OBSERVERS SAY THE ELECTORATE IS APATHETIC AND INDIFFERENT AND THAT PUBLIC INTEREST IN THE ELECTIONS IS THE LOWEST IN MEMORY. COMING SO CLOSELY ON THE HEELS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY POLL, THE ELECTIONS SEEM TO BE AN ANTI-CLIMAX, AND THE GENERAL FEELING IS THAT VOTER TURNOUT WILL BE VERY LOW, SOMEWHERE IN THE RANGE OF 40 TO 50 PERCENT. CAMPAIGNING HAS BEEN GENERALLY SMOOTH AND FREE FROM VIOLENCE, AND WE HAVE HARDLY VIRTUALLY NO CHARGES OF POSSIBLE RIGGING OR OTHER CORRUPT CAMPAIGN

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ACTIVITIES.

2. THE ISSUES AND CAMPAIGN RHETORIC, SUCH AS THEY ARE, REMAIN MUCH THE SAME AS REPORTED IN REFTEL. JANATA CONTINUES TO BASE ITS APPEAL ON THE CLAIM THAT ITS VICTORY IN THE STATES WILL EMPOWER IT TO FINISH THE JOB BEGUN IN MARCH. CONGRESS SEEKS TO HIGHLIGHT THE JANATA'S SHORTCOMINGS BY POINTING TO RISING PRICES, INCREASED CRIME AND POWER AND WATER SHORTAGES. OBSERVERS FEEL, HOWEVER, THAT LOCAL ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES, AS WELL AS THESE BROADER MATTERS IN THE VOTERS' MINDS.

3. JANATA CONTINUES TO SUFFER A TARNISHED IMAGE FROM ITS TICKET SCRAMBLE OF SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, BUT CONGRESS HAS APPARENTLY NOT BENEFITED FROM THIS ISSUE DUE TO THE DISSENSION AND ACUTE DEMORALIZATION IN ITS OWN RANKS. MANY JANATA "REBELS" REMAIN IN THE RUNNING, AND THEIR POTENTIAL TO SPLIT THE JANATA VOTE IS THE MAJOR IMPOUNDERABLE FACTOR IN THESE ELECTIONS. OUR SOURCES TELL US THAT OF THE HUNDREDS

OF INDEPENDENTS AND REBELS IN THE FRAY, ONLY A HANDFUL ARE "SERIOUS" CANDIDATES WHO STAND A CHANCE OF WINNING. THESE ARE MOSTLY JANATA SUPPORTERS WHO HAD OPPOSED THE EMERGENCY OR SUFFERED IN JAIL BUT WERE DENIED JANATA TICKETS IN FAVOR OF RECENT CONGRESS DEFECTORS.

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4. WHILE ALL OBSERVERS DO NOT AGREE ON THE SIZE OF THE MARGIN, THERE IS A GENERAL CONSENSUS THAT JANATA (AND IN PUNJAB THE JANATA/AKALI COMBINED) WILL WIN "COMFORTABLE" MAJORITIES IN EIGHT OF THE TEN STATES GOING TO THE POLLS. WITH THE PERCENTAGE OF SEATS SECURED BY THE PARTY SOMEWHERE IN THE RANGE OF 55 TO 65 PERCENT, CONSIDERABLY LESS IN THESE AREAS THAN IN THE LOK SABHA SWEEP. ONLY IN TAMIL NADU AND WEST BENGAL DOES IT APPEAR TO OBSERVERS THAT THE PARTY WILL FINISH NO BETTER THAN SECOND, A FORECAST EVEN JANATA LEADERS AGREE WITH. THE MAJOR POINT OF SPECULATION IN THESE TWO STATES IS WHETHER THE AIADMK AND CPM RESPECTIVELY WILL SECURE CLEAR MAJORITIES ON THEIR OWN OR WHETHER THEY WILL HAVE TO FORM COALITION GOVERNMENTS. THE EMBASSY, OF COURSE, IS IN NO POSITION TO MAKE A PREDICTION OF IT. (WE DO NOT BELIEVE

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IN ANY EVENT THAT THE VICTORY OF THE MAHARASHTRAWADI GOMANTAK PARTY IN THE JUNE 1 GOA ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS AND THE POOR JANATA SHOWING THERE ARE ANY INDICATION OF THE LIKELY OUTCOME IN OTHER STATES.)

5. THESE GENERAL EXPECTATIONS OF COMFORTABLE JANATA MAJORITIES IN EIGHT OF THE TEN STATES GOING TO THE POOLS, STRESSED BY JANATA LEADERS AS WELL AS OTHER MORE OBJECTIVE OBSERVERS, HAVE BECOME A BENCHMARK AGAINST WHICH THE ACTUAL OUTCOME IS LIKELY TO BE MEASURED. THUS IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT IF JANATA DOES AS WELL AS IT IS EXPECTED TO DO, THIS WILL BE GENERALLY REGARDED AS CONFIRMATION OF THE NATIONAL MANDATE THE PARTY WON IN THE LOK SABHA RACE. IT SHOULD ALSO BOOST THE MORALE OF PARTY LEADERS AND FUNCTIONARIES. THE INSTALLATION OF SECURE JANATA MINISTRIES IN THE EIGHT STATES WILL ALSO FACILITATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS, A POINT JANATA LEADERS HAVE STRESSED TO US. BY THE SAME TOKEN, A "SUB-STANDARD" JANATA PERFORMANCE WILL TEND TO DAMAGE THE PARTY'S SELF-CONFIDENCE, PARTICULARLY IF ITS SETBACK IS MARKED BY CONGRESS GAINS, AND THE RECRIMINATIONS WHICH THIS RETURNS WILL PRODUCE ARE LIKELY TO EXACERBATE DIVISIONS WITHIN ITS RANKS. SUCH AN OUTCOME WILL ALSO LEAD TO DUBIOUS CLAIMS THAT THE PARTY'S NATIONAL MANDATE HAS BEEN SHAKEN, BUT IT SHOULD NOT AFFECT THE GOI'S ABILITY TO GOVERN AT THE CENTER IN ANY MEANINGFUL WAY.

6. THE RESULTS WILL BE CLOSELY EXAMINED BY POLITICAL OBSERVERS IN CONNECTION WITH THE NEXT STEP IN THE INDIAN POLITICAL PROCESS. THE FORMATION OF STATE GOVERNMENTS BY THE NEWLY-ELECTED LEGISLATURES. FROM THE NATIONAL VIEWPOINT, THE IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THIS NEXT STEP WILL BE WHAT IT SIGNIFIES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER AND INFLUENCE AMONG KEY NATIONAL FIGURES AND WHAT IT WILL MEAN FOR THE COHESION OF THE JANATA PARTY. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW STATE GOVERNMENTS COULD BE A LONG AND ACRIMONIOUS ONE IN SEVERAL CASES. U.P. WILL

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PROBABLY SEE THE HARDEST FIGHTING AS HOME MINISTER/BLD BOSS CHARAN SINGH AND PETROLEUM MINISTER CFD CHIEF H. N. BAHUGUNA SEEK TO PLAY THE KING MAKER ROLE IN THE EXPECTATION THAT THE NW STATE LEADERSHIP WILL SUPPORT THEIR NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS. PRESIDENT'S RULE IN U. P. AND SEVERAL OTHER STATES MAY HAVE TO BE PROLONGED AS THE BATTLE FOR THE

CHIEF MINISTERSHIP AND THE ALLOCATION OF OTHER CABINET PORTFOLIOS GOES ON.

7. THE ELECTION RESULTS WILL ALSO BE CLOSELY EXAMINED IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS SUMMER'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. THE JANATA LEADERSHIP HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT IT WANTS TO WIN ENOUGH STATE ASSEMBLY SEATS TO ENSURE THE VICTORY OF ITS CANDIDATE IN AUGUST. HAVING THUS PLACED ITS PRESTIGE ON THE LINE, THE PARTY COULD SUFFER A MAJOR SETBACK IF IT FAILS TO SECURE ENOUGH SEATS TO CLINCH THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. IN THIS EVENT, IT MAY BE FORCED INTO THE EMBARRASSING POSITION OF REVERSING ITS PREVIOUS STATEMENTS AND ACCEPTING THE SO-CALLED "REBELS" BACK INTO ITS FOLD SO THAT THE PRESIDENTIAL POLL'S OUTCOME IS ASSURED.

8. SHOULD THE CONGRESS PERFORM POORLY BY ITS OWN ESTIMATION IN THE ASSEMBLY POLL, THE HANDS OF THOSE ANXIOUS TO OUST MRS. GANDHI AND HER ASSOCIATES WOULD PRESUMABLY BE STRENGTHENED. SUCH A POOR SHOWING COULD ALSO SET THE STAGE FOR A NEW ROUND OF SIGNIFICANT DEFECTS FROM THE PARTY ON A SCALE LARGER THAN WHAT IS CURRENTLY RUMORED IN DELHI TO BE IN THE POST-ELECTION CARDS (E.G. 60 OR MORE CONGRESS MLA'S IN MAHARASHTRA).
GOHEEN

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